

Msgr. Hawkes Dies; Former Financial Chief of Archdiocese in L.A.

By BOB BAKER, *Times Staff Writer*

LOS ANGELES—Msgr. Benjamin G. Hawkes, the financial power broker who built Los Angeles' sprawling Roman Catholic archdiocese into one of the wealthiest in the nation with a tough, no-nonsense style, died Sunday after suffering a stroke. He was 66.

His death came less than three weeks after Hawkes, pastor of the elegantly futuristic St. Basil's Church on Wilshire Boulevard, resigned as the archdiocese's vicar general and director of finances.

For two decades, Hawkes, who left a promising career as an accountant to become a priest, was a powerful behind-the-scenes figure under Cardinals James Francis McIntyre and Timothy Manning.

He directed a massive program of parish and parochial school growth during the 1960s. Later, his management of a swelling array of investments and his purchases and sales of huge parcels of land were credited with eliminating the debt incurred by the development wave. Today the archdiocese's wealth is an estimated \$1 billion, including one of the nation's largest parochial school systems and 23 hospitals. Its membership of 2.56 million surpassed Chicago to make it the nation's largest diocese in 1983.

The archdiocese's recently installed Archbishop Roger Michael Mahony on Sunday called Hawkes "a great churchman" who "was at the very heart and center of every apostolate and major expansion project within this archdiocese. . . . Virtually every parish, our high schools and grammar schools, our health-care facilities and our social services and charitable facilities have been touched by his concern and effort."

"Msgr. Hawkes labored day and night that the kingdom of God might be deeply rooted here in Southern California," Mahony said.

Los Angeles Dodgers owner Peter O'Malley, a St. Basil's parishioner who had known Hawkes since O'Malley's late father, Walter, brought the Dodgers to Los Angeles 25 years ago, said Hawkes "had great foresight. He was a very thoughtful man. He could see ahead. Seldom, I think, did he look backwards."

Hawkes was a commanding, stern-faced figure. When actor Robert DeNiro was preparing to play a monsignor in the 1981 motion picture "True Confessions," he came to observe Hawkes saying Mass.

Because Hawkes had a reputation for dealing sternly with priests who had the misfortune to fall out of favor with McIntyre or Manning and because he was the man priests and parochial school administrators

had to see to obtain funding for their building plans, he attracted critics.

Some priests and Catholic laymen complained that some of his decisions about church personnel and finances were arbitrary or insensitive. One of the most publicized transactions is the yet-to-be-finalized plan to close Cathedral High School in Chinatown and sell the property to development interests from Hong Kong for a price estimated between \$8 million and \$14 million.

The Rev. Joseph Battaglia, the archdiocese's director of communications, said Hawkes did not have a great number of close friends, but added, "I would say that is true of most priests."

When Mahony was chosen to succeed Manning, who retired at age 75, Hawkes offered his resignation in what church officials characterized as a traditional courtesy to an incoming administration. Battaglia said Hawkes was not surprised when Mahony accepted.

After Mahony announced the resignation at an empowerment ceremony Sept. 4, a number of priests—unwilling to be quoted by name—said they believed the end of Hawkes' "dynasty" would help Mahony establish a positive rapport with the archdiocese's 1,300 priests.

While Mahony praised Hawkes in announcing his acceptance of the financial director's resignation, the contrasts between the men were striking.

The new archbishop is, at 49, the nation's youngest, with a reputation for liberal social concern. His speeches pledge special support to the poor and underprivileged.

Hawkes wore expensive black suits and gold cuff links, belonged to the exclusive Jonathan Club and the Los Angeles Country Club, routinely associated with the rich and powerful people of Los Angeles and was fond of telling his fellow priests: "The rich have souls, too."

Father John Moloney, senior associate pastor of Hawkes' church, said that although Hawkes had a history of high blood pressure, he had experienced no health problems in recent weeks.

Moloney said Hawkes returned to Los Angeles on Wednesday from a one-week trip to Rome. Friday morning, "he wasn't up and we got a bit anxious," Moloney said.

Moloney said he found Hawkes on the floor of the church's rectory. "He had clearly suffered a stroke," the pastor said.

Hawkes was taken to Queen of Angels Hospital. A spokesman said his death Sunday was caused by complications from the massive stroke.